

Opening Statement of the Honorable Joseph R. Pitts
Subcommittee on Health
Hearing on “Examining H.R. 2646, the Helping Families in Mental Health Crisis Act”
June 16, 2015

(As Prepared for Delivery)

Today’s Health Subcommittee hearing will examine the legislation authored by our colleague, Rep. Tim Murphy, H.R. 2646, which is designed to help families struggling with crisis caused by mental health disorders. The bill makes available much needed psychiatric, psychological, and supportive services for individuals with mental illness and families in crisis.

With more than 11 million Americans who suffer with severe mental illness such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and major depression, many are going without treatment and often families struggle to find appropriate care for their loved ones.

Since there is a patchwork of different programs and sometimes ineffective policies across numerous agencies, it is important for this committee to examine ways to fix the broken mental health system by focusing and coordinating programs and resources on psychiatric care for patients and families most in need of services.

Over the past several years, Dr. Murphy, a practicing psychologist, has worked diligently to discern the most effective ways to research and treat these illnesses. As Chairman of the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, Chairman Murphy launched a review of the country’s mental health system beginning in January 2013. The investigation, which included public forums, hearings with expert witnesses, document and budget reviews, and GAO studies revealed that the federal government’s approach to mental health is a chaotic patchwork of antiquated programs and ineffective policies spread across numerous agencies with little to no coordination. The Helping Families in Mental Health Crisis Act of 2015, H.R. 2646, aims to fix the nation’s broken mental health system by refocusing programs, reforming grants, and removing barriers to care.

Today’s hearing will also examine H.R. 2690, Including Families in Mental Health Recovery Act of 2015, introduced by Rep. Matsui of California. This bill focuses on clarifying the circumstances health care providers are covered entities and may disclose the protected health information of patients with mental illness.

I am pleased we are holding this hearing today to hear from our witnesses and colleagues about their views on this pending legislation.

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